



Remarks by Secretary of Homeland Security Tom Ridge at the Asia-Pacific Homeland Security Summit

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(Remarks as Prepared)

Good morning. Thank you, Governor, for that warm introduction. I appreciate your kind words. And I want to thank everyone here today for the commitment you have shown in confronting the complex challenges we face in the war on terror. For those of you who attended this summit last year, you may remember a few technical difficulties with my speech. Failed satellite video, falling DHS seals -- let's just say I thought I better get here in person this year. And I was glad to make the trip, not just to escape the wintry DC weather, but also to be a part of this important dialogue about the threat of terrorism and our responsibility as an international community to combat it.

The American people know that we will always find friends and strength in international partners -- in the Asia-Pacific Region, in the United Nations -- in a true "culture of cooperation." And that is important. Because we know all too well -- from the terrorist attacks in America, in Bali and Jakarta, in Beslan, in Istanbul, in Madrid, in the incidents of destruction and chaos that occur each and every day -- that terrorism is a global scourge, not a regional one.

And a global enemy requires a global response. The battle we wage against the terrorists is not one fought by America alone. It is fought by every nation and every citizen that stands on the side of hope and liberty. And the means to win this war rests in our ability to engage the world community, work together multi-laterally, and foster healthy dialogue and strategic cooperation among our allies.

When we talk about homeland security here in the United States, we place an imperative on the value of partnerships. In our view, terrorism is not just an enemy fought by the federal government or soldiers on a battlefield. It is also fought by citizen volunteers, first responders, local leaders, and parents who prepare their families and remain ever vigilant.

This integration of our nation forms the foundation of our homeland security strategy and is a guiding principle of our work with the international community. Just as we strive to close gaps and vulnerabilities at our own borders by pooling resources and engaging our entire country and citizenry, we must do the same with our international allies and friends.

We must integrate our anti-terrorism efforts by reaching out in a spirit of global cooperation and partnership. We must build bridges to each other and build barriers to terrorists. We must share resources, strategies and technology. We must engage every nation that values freedom if we are to defeat the shadow soldiers of terror. And that is exactly what we have done. Already in pursuit of our shared mission, we have seen unprecedented cooperation at the international level.

Since the events of September 11th, a counter-terrorism coalition of nearly 70 nations has been working together in the critical areas of law enforcement, information sharing, transportation security, cyber security and financial asset seizure.

Many nations in the Asia-Pacific region have made integral contributions to the war on terrorism -- significantly building and improving counterterrorism capabilities in the immediate aftermath of the September 11th attacks. And through organizations such as APEC, we have worked toward the implementation of international standards and programs that protect our ports, cargo, borders and other vital infrastructure.

Especially in the area of maritime security, we have made marked progress with programs such as the Container Security Initiative. Since the launch of CSI, we now have U.S. Customs inspectors working alongside our partners

to target and screen cargo in 32 international ports including Singapore, Hong Kong, and Malaysia.

With the use of large-scale gamma ray and x-ray imaging systems, Customs officers can safely and efficiently screen for contraband, including weapons of mass destruction. These units can scan the interior of a full-size, 40-foot container in under one minute. In this way, we are able to enhance the security of our nations without sacrificing the free and swift flow of commerce on which our economy depends.

The Asia – Pacific region has some of the largest container ports in the world and one third of the world's shipping and half of its oil pass through the straits of Southeast Asia. As such, the success of this program is closely linked to the tremendous support and partnership we have received from the region.

It's important to note that prior to 9/11, efforts to secure the vast global shipping industry – both in America and throughout the world – were isolated, scattered and uncoordinated. Like other areas of vulnerability, we recognized the problem and worked with our international partners to take action.

As a result, the International Ship and Port Facility Security Code was developed. For the first time ever, we have one global standard for ship and port security, and we are moving forward rapidly to implement that standard. This effort will increase our ability – and that of our allies – to prevent terrorists from attacking our ports or using ships as weapons.

While we have accomplished a great deal, we can not allow past success to lull us into complacency. The terrorists are constantly at work; they are adaptable and untiring. And so we must not grow complacent. We must continue to rise to new levels of security and protection for our nations and our citizens.

Especially in the areas of port and border security, we have an opportunity to go even further in building up our defenses. By utilizing our collective strength, sharing information and integrating people and technology more completely we can improve both the free flow of trade and travelers as well as enhance our security. About ninety percent of all world cargo moves in and out of international ports in containers. For the sake of security and prosperity, we must take additional steps to secure cargo – and, along with it, the foundation for global commerce.

A good place to start – this is similar to what we did with port security – is forge a commitment to standards. Such cooperation could include the development of common standards for cargo and consistent procedures that would allow countries to build upon existing protections to make shipping containers – and the ports they reach – more secure than ever before.

However, process and procedures are not enough. We also need to harness the power of technology and take advantage of innovative tools already available. Technologies such as electronic seals and container-tracking devices offer additional protections against container tampering – thus further securing our ports and ships from possible attack. And just as we can utilize advanced technology and unprecedented cooperation to secure our ports, we can do the same at our land borders and points of entry.

One of the primary resources at our disposal as we move forward to make our borders safer is biometrics. Biometrics is proving to be a valuable and useful security tool allowing us to accurately identify and cross check travelers – and potential terrorists – before they enter our countries.

In America, we have already seen through our US-VISIT program that biometric information can provide an added layer of security, while at the same time bring travelers across our borders with greater ease and convenience.

Since the beginning of the year, US-VISIT has processed more than 12 million legitimate passengers, and since the program began we have matched more than 1500 potential entrants against criminal watch lists. However, to apply the use of biometrics globally, we must develop a set of international standards for capturing, analyzing, storing, reading and protecting biometric data in order to ensure maximum interoperability between systems, and maximum privacy for individuals.

In that spirit, let me say clearly: The United States is particularly sensitive to the historical, constitutional and cultural differences among nations. We are mindful of concerns over the issues of standards and civil liberties with respect to biometrics, machine-readable passports, border security, student visas and other security

changes.

That is why we are working closely with our friends in the Asia-Pacific Region, in the European Union and elsewhere, to seek common ground on these important issues. And we will continue to do so

Together we have made significant strides in our international security efforts, yet there is much still to be done. We face a long road ahead not only to defeat terrorism but also to uproot the ideology of hate that breeds and sustains our enemies.

All of you in this room understand what's at stake in this great challenge of our time. To defeat terrorism can at times seem a daunting task, but we must remain undeterred and undaunted. This task has been appointed to us, and it is our responsibility to see it through to completion.

Ronald Reagan once said, "The ultimate determinant in the struggle now going on for the world will not be bombs and rockets but a test of wills and ideas – a trial of spiritual resolve: the values we hold, the beliefs we cherish and the ideals to which we are dedicated." Those words were spoken in a different time to characterize a different war, but they could just as easily have been spoken yesterday to characterize the war we now fight. The victory in the Cold War came about as a result of a robust international effort and an unquenchable desire for freedom on the part of those who lived without it.

And that is the same path that will lead us to victory once again. For freedom is more powerful than fear. And when wielded by nations willing to work together for the safety and security of our people, freedom will continue to guide us toward a better and brighter future: a future of prosperity and peace for generations to come.

Thank you.

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